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S E R M O N

PREACHED BEFORE THE

HONOURABLE HOUSE OF COMMONS,

AT THE

CHURCH OF St. MARGARET's, WESTMINSTER,

ON FRIDAY, DECEMBER 13, 1776;

BEING

The Day appointed by HIS MAJESTY'S ROYAL PROCLAMATION, to be
observed as a Day of SOLEMN FASTING and HUMILIATION.

BY JOHN BUTLER, LL. D. *K*

ARCHDEACON OF SURREY, AND CHAPLAIN IN ORDINARY
TO HIS MAJESTY.

L O N D O N:

PRINTED FOR T. CADELL IN THE STRAND.

MDCCLXXVII,

Die Veneris, 13^o Decembris, 1776.

ORDERED, *nemine contradicente*,

That the Thanks of this House be given to the Reverend Doctor JOHN BUTLER, for the Sermon by him preached this Day, before this House, at St. Margaret's, Westminster, and that he be desired to print the same; and that the Lord NORTH and Mr. CHARLES TOWNSEND do acquaint him therewith.

J. HATSELL.

Cl. Dom. Com.

S E R M O N, &c.

I KINGS, CHAP. VIII. VER. 59.

Let these my words, wherewith I have made supplication before the Lord, be nigh unto the Lord our God day and night, that he maintain the cause of his servant, and the cause of his people Israel at all times, as the matter shall require.

THIS is part of the conclusion of the prayer delivered by SOLOMON, at his dedication of the Temple he had built. The Jewish was distinguished from all other Religions, then believed and practised in the world, chiefly by the profession of the Unity and Providence of God, as its fundamental Doctrines. This appears from many passages of the Old Testament, as well as from the apology made for his nation, by their most faithful historian JOSEPHUS. The truths, which resulted from, or presupposed those Doctrines, directed the measures of the State, and the lives of Individuals, till both Prince and People apostatised to Idolatry.

King SOLOMON, at this time, fully possessed with the Idea, which so wise a man, in his best days, could not fail to entertain,

tain, of the Providence, the Omnipresence, the Power, the Justice, and the Mercy of God, takes a comprehensive view of the various Cases and Exigencies, in which the succour of Heaven might, at any remote period, become particularly desirable to his Subjects, and anticipates the Prayers, which they would be impelled by their Distresses at such times to offer.

“ When thy people Israel are smitten down before the Enemy,
 “ because they have sinned against thee ; — when Heaven
 “ is shut up, and there is no Rain, because they have sinned
 “ against thee ; — if there be in the land Famine ; if there
 “ be Pestilence ; if their Enemy besiege them in the land of
 “ their cities ; whatsoever Plague, whatsoever Sickness there
 “ be ; what prayer and supplication soever be made by any
 “ man, or by all thy people Israel, which shall know every
 “ man the plague of his own heart ; — then hear thou in
 “ Heaven their prayer and supplication.” — And after
 reciting these and other possible cases, he sums them up in my
 text, by imploring the protection and favour of God, in “ main-
 “ taining, at all times, the Cause of himself and his people ;”
 which Causes, though separately mentioned, he appears, like a
 true Father of his People, to consider as One.

Our present Solemnity is founded in the same principle, of the dependence of Nations, as well as Individuals, upon the Providence of God. It is a Christian, no less than a Jewish, doctrine. It descended from Heaven along with the Mosaic Dispensation ; but lest it should be understood, as peculiarly

belonging to the Jewish Theocracy, it was confirmed and amplified by the blessed Founder of our Religion, who never spake more clearly as one having Authority, than when he declared, that every the most minute part of nature, animal or vegetable, and consequently all human affairs, are under the divine Direction and Providence.

As religious Doctrines are too apt to be more or less attended to, in proportion as they are more or less immediately interesting, this Doctrine can hardly fail to attract our attention, at the present time. Our late public peace and prosperity were evidently not the Produce of our own independent Power. If they had been so, we should not have laboured under the present suspension of them. The same Power of our own, that made us peaceable and happy, would certainly have continued us so, as Peace and Happiness are, at all times, the most desirable state of things.

We are involved in War, which, under the most favourable circumstances, is by no means an eligible state. As it implies expence of Blood and Treasure, interruption of Commerce, alienation of the minds of men from the amiable Attachments, the useful Employments, and innocent Pleasures of life, to authorised Violence, Rapine, and Slaughter, it is generally an extensive and a grievous Calamity, even when it is victorious; and it is known to be always pregnant with every human Misery to the Vanquished.

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If these Evils of War in general are sufficient, to impress the minds of a people involved in it, with a lively sense of their dependence upon God, the same sense should be impressed more deeply upon us, under the heavy judgment of a necessary war, in which the most signal and meritorious victory, on our side, is embittered by the very thing essential to victory, the losses sustained by the other.

The greatest empires have had their fall. Some of them have disappeared so totally, that no more than their names and their history remain; and, in the case of most of them, intestine divisions have brought on their dissolution. The BRITISH empire has sustained a shock, which, though it will not, we trust, affect us vitally, is convulsive to the best constituted body politic. "The hands and the feet have said to the head, we have no need of thee."

Our fellow-subjects, in a distant part of the empire, have exchanged Peace and Order for Anarchy; or if, in wandering out of the paths of Peace, they have alighted upon some faint semblance of Government, it appears, in its immediate effects at least, to be a most miserable refuge. As if coolly determined to consummate this ruin, they have renounced the Allegiance due to the British Crown, the natural and equitable as well as legal return, for a protection, from which in great measure they derive the strength they are now consuming in vain attempts of Independency; and to accumulate evils upon us, as well as themselves, they have provoked the application of a naval and military force, so valuable for their
 8 defence

defence as well as ours, to the purpose of restoring them to a sense of their Interest and Duty.

I enter not into their pretences. Discussions of that sort, if they were suited to this place, are now become unnecessary. Nor will it be of use to charge them with all the circumstances of their guilt. This is not a day of strife and debate. We are met, seriously to look every man into his own heart, and, in lamenting the condition of his country before God, to consider, how far he himself has contributed to the Evils he laments.

But the Preacher, in applying religious truth to civil transactions, cannot entirely overlook the principal Facts he receives from public authority and obvious appearances. Both these concur, in the present case, in supplying him with the unhappy reflexion, which it would be false candour to dissemble, that many of our fellow-subjects in AMERICA have brought the Mischiefs of War upon themselves and us, by taking up arms against a legal Authority, legally exercised.

No man, who breathes the air of this country, and feels the benefit of it, would abruptly, or too severely, censure any exercise of Liberty. There was a time, when lawful Resistance was treated as a contradiction in terms. Thanks to some great Names, who have speculated upon the Rights of Mankind, and to some greater Worthies, who have struggled for them, we have discovered, that Resistance may not only be necessary, but that it may be lawful, that it may even be meritorious.

meritorious. I need not add, that the Discovery has produced and secured to us the Happiness, religious and civil, we enjoy.

But Resistance to a legal Authority, exercising none but legal powers, for the attainment of legal purposes, is not one of the Privileges contended for in the last Century; and no system of religion and morals, no principles of civil Society, will countenance it. We might appeal to the hearts of our American fellow-subjects, if their hearts were cool enough to admit the appeal, by what name to describe Resistance to an authority, so constituted, and so exerted.

But, evident as it is, that they are engaged in REBELLION, it is a further melancholy consideration before us, that the instruments of War cannot, in suppressing so dangerous an Evil, distinguish the different degrees of Guilt in the hearts of those who commit it; for we may presume, without a detail of facts, that very few of them in comparison act upon the deliberate Judgment of their own minds.

Men in the inferior parts of life are seldom capable of deep political designs, of bold and remote schemes for Empire, to be conducted by the sacrifice of private tranquillity, the loss of property, and the hazard of life. They are in such cases allured by the various Arts, with which superior Understandings circumvent inferior.

At a distance from the Seat of Government, they are easily misinformed about public Persons, Measures, and Events; and
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when their minds are sufficiently prepared by Misrepresentation, they are easily flattered with the notion of their having been born to be the Saviours of their Country, and are unfortunately captivated by it, without waiting for authentic intelligence, whether their country stands at that time in need of a political Saviour. Others, with understandings more callous to flattery, may be intimidated by insinuations of the infamy of absenting from the standard, erected in a common cause; which is a language, generally addressed with effect to the most ingenuous disinterested minds.

When by means of this kind they have been seduced into criminal conduct, and so appear obnoxious to public vengeance, the truth is, that they are objects of commiseration; neither knowing, what they do, nor wherefore they are met, nor to what point their first commotions tend.

In this state of Ignorance, which, in all common sense, should lead to Inaction, we have unhappily experienced, that bodies of men, numerous enough to agitate the whole Continent of NORTH AMERICA, have been persuaded or compelled, to desert their families, and their proper employment, to give up their peace of mind, and to incur the hazard of falling victims to the wild and daring Turbulency of a few real Criminals.

Among the various lights, in which such an event will be considered at this distance, the most instructive is that, which, by exhibiting the true Cause, fills us with religious awe. It

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is, as the sublime Prophet speaks, “ the shaking of the hand
“ of the Lord of Hosts, which he shaketh over us.”

This will not indeed alter the nature of their Guilt, but it will place our minds in the right posture for Humiliation, and dispose us at the same time to sympathise in their distress, as the result of the Divine displeasure against us all.

If we consider them, as seduced to the ruin of their country; as looking back with regret every man at his own home, at the Liberty and Affluence he enjoyed, before the preparations for War laid every thing about him waste, and before his own part in it impoverished his family, soured his own temper with Anger, Hatred and Malice, and at last dejected his mind, with the severe Mortification of having inconsiderately relinquished perhaps for ever, the solid Blessings of life; we cannot with Indifference, nor without many serious reflexions, behold a large number of Fellow-creatures, in Language and Blood our Countrymen, so self-condemned, and afflicted under the mighty Hand of God.

If the instruments of Guilt have so strong a Claim to our Compassion, what shall we say to the much harder lot of loyal Subjects, in that distracted Scene, whose sufferings are more intimately ours; who aggravate the Oppressions they undergo, by maintaining a Character, which silently reproaches their Oppressors; who, without participating in the Guilt of it, have tasted the bitter Fruits of Rebellion, in being deprived, along with their Property, of the Blessings of a happy free Govern-
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ment, and falling under a Tyranny, which, like all real Tyrannies, it is at the same time meritorious and penal to resist.

Their sufferings have been too great and too various, to be minutely remembered, on a day, which may be better employed than in Accusation. Many of them have had recourse to their original Parent, the British Nation, for the poor Comfort of personal safety, whilst the uncertain state of their families and friends, the Ravage and Desolation of their country, are uppermost in their thoughts.

God knows, these are not in them the Horrors of a gloomy Imagination; they are founded in many instances in history of the peculiar Animosity of Civil Wars, in many Facts, transmitted from that seat of complicated Distress, and in the violence always observable on the side, that is acting against Reason.

So far we have Cause to lament the American Calamities, as in many respects our own. If we turn to our Prospect at home, it is not indeed so tragical at this time. The Evils of War are hitherto less sensibly felt by us, and we form reasonable hopes of the Issue of it, from the Success with which it hath pleased God to prosper our military Efforts. But very little observation upon any similar state of things, will incline us to deprecate, most earnestly, the possible mischiefs of a Civil War, however distant.

The British Forces have maintained their Honor, in acting a brave and loyal part. Happy as this is for their King and Country, and honourable as it is for themselves, it doth not

amuse our minds with those flattering ideas of Glory and Conquest, which are apt to animate a more natural War. Our Success, great as it has been, barely compensates for the painful Necessity of the War, and for the Anxiety, which good Men, looking forward at the whole Extent of this Evil, have suffered, from the possible chance of a Defeat.

It is an Anxiety, rather unworthy of us, with a just Cause in our hands, and such Forces in our service. But it is pardonable, to be over-solicitous for the Good we enjoy, and to be alarmed at the bare possibility of seeing the destructive Flame of Civil Discord communicated from any part of the Globe, however remote. The Diseases of men's Minds are more contagious at a distance, than those of their Bodies; and if we had grounds to apprehend, that the same Contempt of Government and public tranquillity would pervade the rest of the British Empire, our Case would be deplorable indeed.

But no present Appearances will justify such an Apprehension. God be praised, we not only excel other nations in public Happiness, but most of us feel our Pre-eminence too sensibly, to be seduced, by any Arts, to relinquish it.

What grounds we have, to expect the Continuance of it from the Protection of Heaven, is the important Question of this day, addressed to every thoughtful man, who knows from History and Experience, that national Sins are the Causes of national Calamities. Doubtless the same Causes operate in the
 2 Country

Country which is now the Theatre of War ; but we need not cross the ATLANTIC for Sins, to account for our share in the present Troubles.

We are as sinful a Nation, as a fruitful Land and a flourishing Commerce can make us. The natural effects of such abundance as ours, let loose upon the human heart, when it is unguarded by good Principles, are, Pride and Sensuality.

“ Pride goeth before Destruction, and an haughty Spirit before a Fall,” in the case of Nations as well as Individuals. In America, it affects Independency of legal Government. Among us, it seems to aim at a yet more ruinous Independency of God ; for woe to a People out of the divine Protection !

Sensuality vitiates our appetites, whilst it debases our understandings. It is pernicious even to future generations, leading on to many instances of natural, and every branch of moral Evil.

It seems of no use to descend to Particulars, as every Man is supposed this day to examine himself, and see the Truth of his Case more distinctly, than the best observations of others can lay it before him. Nor would it be of any use ; on the contrary, it would be injurious, and might be mischievous to our country, to exaggerate the national Guilt beyond the Truth.

If we were all a nation of Libertines ; defying our God ; contemning the best authorised principles of Religion ; violating

lating all the relative duties of life, without hesitation and without remorse; perfectly indifferent to public Good; sacrificing our private Property to the vain and tormenting pursuit of more, by the mere operation of Chance; destroying our health, and consuming our time, in a dissipation, which at best renders us absolutely useless to the world; if this were precisely the national Character, it would be quite unwarrantable to prognosticate Good to such a People.

But there are comfortable appearances, sufficient to secure us from Despondency, and to moderate the zeal of general declamation.

Wealth and Plenty, bad as their effects in some respects are, have administered materials to the practice of Virtues, which characterise our Country. No nation appears to be so distinguished by acts of Humanity, Liberality, and genuine Christian Charity; by noble instances of warm Friendship, of delicate Honour, in the best sense of the word, and of unbounded Benevolence.

Nor are the tendencies to Dissoluteness and Irreligion universal, at least not in appearance; whilst the numbers are so observably great, in most parts of the Kingdom, of men, who "study to be quiet, and do their own business, in all Godliness and Honesty;" who have Virtues, that operate with little splendour, but much effect, upon the Community; and seem to be our shield, as far as man can be so, whenever divine Judgments are impending over us.

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But as the good, which may be truly spoken of us, is certainly far from being a full counterbalance to our sins, there remains, after every comfort, too much reason for the humiliation of this day, in order to obtain the Mercy, most devoutly to be wished and prayed for, by Persons of all Opinions and Denominations, Restoration of Peace and Union to the British Empire.

Success to our Arms, is always the laudable Wish and Prayer of every friend to his country. But the most favourable Events of War are never desirable for their own sake. It is for the sake of Peace, the ultimate Object of War, that considerate men receive, with joyful Acclamations, the news of a Victory, especially over a people, whom we wish to preserve and reconcile.

We are therefore concerned in point of Humanity, of Christian Charity, and, if I may venture so far out of my Province before this great Assembly, we are concerned in point of true Policy, to beseech that Almighty Being, in whose disposal the hearts of all men are, to turn the hearts and minds of our deluded fellow-subjects, that they may "follow after the things that make for peace," and instead of endeavouring to strengthen the hands of Men, whose Designs cannot be executed without the Ruin of their country, return for Protection to the Power, to which it naturally belongs to protect and defend every part of the Empire, and the Power, from which every part can most effectually receive Protection and Defence.

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The radical Injury, which the Parent State has received from those Colonies, is that of being suspected of meditating absolute Dominion over them. Our Constitution, both religious and civil, abhors the idea; and the several branches of the Legislature have this day solemnly disavowed it, by uniting with the whole Kingdom in Prayer to Almighty God for better objects, for the Re-establishment of Peace and Good-will, of Subordination and free Government in British America.

It is a most pacific Prayer, for our fellow-subjects there are deeply interested to join in it.

May they ingenuously open their minds to receive the Benefits of it! May the good work of this day soon take effect, in putting an end to all mutual Animosities! May "Ephraim"* no longer be supposed to "envy Judah, nor Judah to vex "Ephraim!" May all parts of this great Empire strive against each other in zealous Efforts to promote the Prosperity of the whole, under the Illustrious House at the head of it! And in order thereto, may it become a Public Object, to revive the Spirit of true Religion, that best Principle of Action, which never excited, never fomented an unnecessary civil Contest; and whose salutary influence must visibly decline amidst the Licence of War, and be entirely obstructed by the unchristian Malevolence, which distinguishes, weakens, and finally subverts a Kingdom divided against itself!

* Isa. xi. 13.

